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## Aids to Bible Readers.

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### THE FORESHADOWINGS OF THE CHRIST. VI.

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#### VII. FORESHADOWINGS FROM THE TIME OF THE BABYLONIAN EXILE.

*The Exile.—History.—Outward events and environment.—Spiritual progress in the Exile.—Three Periods.—Hopes for the future.—Return.—The New Community.—Foresadowings.—The “Servant.”*

##### I. THE HISTORY OF THE EXILE.

The time of the exile was coincident with one of the most decisive and critical epochs of the world's history. It was also the period in which the people of Israel passed through a great spiritual revolution. Its duration is somewhat indefinite. There was a gradual dispersion of the Hebrew people, beginning from the last years of the northern kingdom. It is evident that the Hebrews found refuge during the troubled times of the last century of the state in all parts of the oriental world, upon the western seacoast and the islands, in Egypt, in northern Syria, in Mesopotamia, and in the lower Euphrates valley. It is usual to regard the exiles as those who were removed to Babylonia by Nebuchadrezzar and to accept the prophetic number of seventy years as the time of their sojourn there. But it is impossible to settle upon any one event in the history of the time from which seventy years can be counted to a second definite event closing the exile, and it has been estimated that there were at least six different deportations of sections of the Jewish people into the region of Babylonia. We purpose, therefore, as introductory to the study of the foreshadowings of this period, to hasten rapidly over the history of the age of the Jewish exile in its larger scope.

1. *The last days of Judah.*—The transfer of the kingdom of Judah from Egypt to Babylon consequent upon the defeat of Necho at the battle of Carchemish, B. C. 604, seems to have been the occasion of a deportation which is mentioned in Dan. 1:1. Jehoiakim remained

faithful to Nebuchadrezzar for some years, but in 598 he rebelled at the instigation of Egypt. The rebellion was promptly suppressed and the offenders punished, though Jehoiakim probably died before Nebuchadrezzar or his army reached the city of Jerusalem. His son Jehoiakin had to suffer the penalty in his stead, and with him, in 597, the best of the citizens were carried to Babylonia and there settled. Among them was the prophet Ezekiel. Nebuchadrezzar placed upon the throne Zedekiah, whom he expected to prove faithful. Once in the course of his reign Zedekiah must needs go to Babylon to assure the king of his fidelity, but finally the pressure became too great for him, and in 587 he seems to have revolted. This time the people recognized the desperate character of their situation and defended the city with great obstinacy for some months, but at last in 586 it was captured, the walls and temple demolished, the city fired, and the great mass of the inhabitants removed to Babylonia. Jeremiah, who had expected this condition of things and predicted it, chose to remain with the lowest class of the population for the purpose of preserving, if possible, the continuity of the national life. But the Israelite prince, Gedaliah, placed in authority by the Chaldæans, was murdered by a fanatic or a freebooter, and those who were left in authority, fearing the consequences, fled to Egypt, carrying Jeremiah with them.

2. *The new Babylonian, or Chaldæan, Empire.*—The deported Jews found themselves planted in the great center of the world's life and under the control of a ruler, than whom in all preceding history none was greater. The task which lay before Nebuchadrezzar was one of restoration and consolidation, and he performed it with vigor and success. Babylonia, as the prize between the contending Assyrians and Chaldæans, had suffered terribly. Its capital had been utterly destroyed by one Assyrian conqueror, rebuilt by another, and was the center of a great revolt under the last great Assyrian king Asshurbanipal. Nebuchadrezzar's work, as his inscriptions indicate, was devoted to the rebuilding of the ruined city and the restoration of trade and agriculture throughout his land. It is not unlikely that the Jews were transported to the very heart of his dominions in order that they might occupy depopulated lands and assist in carrying out the king's policy. As the representative of a new dynasty, and of the victory of a new people, the Chaldæans, over the ancient Semitic Babylonians, it was also the purpose of Nebuchadrezzar to consolidate the two peoples into one nation. To this end he seems to have devoted himself to the propagation of a special form of religious faith, viz., the worship of

the city god of Babylon, Marduk, and expressions in his inscription concerning this deity in their fervor and devotion have reminded scholars of the Hebrew psalms. During his long reign it is probable that the commerce and trade of Babylonia reached their highest point, and the fame of the great king as a builder, an administrator, and a warrior extended into all the earth.

But there were two difficulties in the way of the accomplishment of his purpose. His successors were unequal to the task of carrying out his policy, and at his death the amalgamation of the two peoples was not sufficiently strong to endure. Intrigues and murders characterized the few years that followed him, while in the person of the last king of the empire, Nabonidus, the Semitic Babylonian element appears again to have laid hold of the reins of government. But besides this internal weakness a more threatening difficulty was apparent from without. The Median kingdom, which had united with the Babylonian in the overthrow of Assyria, and had received as its portion of the spoils the lands to the north and east of the Tigris, had gained new life, and was pushing on in every direction to conquest under the rule of the young and energetic Persian Cyrus. The conflict could not be long delayed. The other world powers, Lydia, Sparta, Egypt, and Babylon, allied themselves against him in vain. Lydia was the first to fall. Then followed Babylon, which in 538 opened its gates to the conqueror. The old Semitic empires disappear; a new race, the Aryan, takes up the reins of government, and a new era in the world's history begins.

All these wonderful changes took place while the Jews were settled in Babylonia, and culminated in that very land. One of the very first events which followed the conquest of Cyrus was the promulgation of the decree by which the Jews were permitted to return to their old home.

3. *The inner history of the exiles.*—What were the Jews thinking and doing during these eventful years passed by them among the rivers of Babylon? This is a most important question; but the answer to it is equally difficult. Our only source of direct knowledge comes from the historical records of the Jews which illumine the beginning and the end of the period. They tell us of the destruction and the deportation, they tell us of the return, but except for one or two facts there is silence concerning the life of the exiles between these points.

But there are records of what prophets taught them during these years, and from these we may infer with a reasonable degree of success

the course of their life. The two great unquestionably historic figures are Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah's later life during those sad years of Zedekiah's reign and the entire active career of Ezekiel were spent in what we may call the period of the exile. Jeremiah, however, devoted himself primarily to the people of Jerusalem. Only once does he seem to have concerned himself with the affairs of the exiles. Ezekiel is preëminently the prophet of the exile.

Chapters 40—66 of the Book of Isaiah, whether we hold that it is the production of Isaiah of Jerusalem or of an unknown second Isaiah of the exile, deal with the condition and prospects of Israel in exile, and thus throw light upon their thoughts and condition. Songs from the Psalter are ascribed to this period and illustrate its character. The most difficult problem in this connection is to determine the use to be made of the Book of Daniel. There is a general consensus of opinion that the book in its present form belongs to a much later period, and that the narratives of the first six chapters and the prophecies of the rest of the book bear the stamp of a writer addressing Israel suffering from the cruelties of Antiochus IV. But it seems reasonable to hold that the experiences of Daniel and his companions were in essential harmony with the traditions which rooted in the exilic period, and may be employed, therefore, in a general way to elucidate and confirm the undoubted utterances and experiences of the exiled people.

Gathering together all this information and analyzing it, we may distinguish several periods in the spiritual history of the exiles. (1) Those who were deported in 597 cherished in their captivity the confident expectation that they would soon return. It was a false hope against which Ezekiel preached with all his might, though in vain, until the actual overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar in 586 confirmed his teaching, destroyed the false confidence, and reduced the people to utter despair. (2) After the first shock of grief was over they were the more ready to listen to the demand of the prophet for repentance, and we have much evidence going to show that the middle period of the exile was a time of profound repentance among them. It is to this repentant and chastened community that Ezekiel preached in his later period, and for them he unrolled the vivid and detailed panorama of the restored nation and temple. The echo of the prophet's preaching during these years is heard in those elegies which make up the pathetic Book of Lamentations. But Ezekiel's voice is hushed while Nebuchadrezzar still reigns, and while the yoke of Chaldean authority still presses. For ten years longer there is no light.

The promises remain unfulfilled. (3) What wonder that the community again begins to despair, that many fall away, and emphasize their apostasy by the persecution of those who remain faithful. Nebuchadnezzar dies, and the troubles of the following years and the appearance of Cyrus bring matters to a climax. The apostates are yet more bitter, the Babylonian yoke more severe, but also the faithful hope anew and look for speedy release. Unable to understand altogether the meaning of Jehovah's permitting them to suffer, they yet endure, cheered and enlightened by the message that has been preserved for us in the second part of Isaiah. At last the hour comes and they are free to realize their hopes. They rejoice in the fulfilment of Jehovah's promises to his servant and prepare for the homeward journey.

## II. OUTLOOKS FOR THE FUTURE.

The material in the writings of this period which might justly be laid under contribution in the discussion of the Foreshadowings is so considerable and important that it cannot be successfully considered in a few pages. It will be necessary, therefore, to select the most salient points and endeavor to group about them that which, though worthy of special consideration, must be regarded as subordinate. Much will be left for the student to work out for himself.

1. *The return and restoration.*—One might almost say that the predominant note struck by the writings of this time is the expectation of return to the old land and the restoration of the old institutions. Earlier prophets had already promised it. The voices of this time repeat with renewed emphasis the joyful message (Ezek. 11:17; 36:24; Isa. 43:5; 45:13; 61:4).

In Isaiah 40—66, where this return is as it were at the door, the most vivid pictures are given of the homeward march. As they pass through the desert, Jehovah leading them, springs of water appear to refresh them; verdure starts up on every side. The stunted growth is transformed into the splendid forest, and with rejoicings upon their lips they move onward into the promised land (Isa. 40:3-5, 10; 41:15-20; 48:20, 21; 49:6-13; 51:9-11; 52:1-12).

A typical passage of restoration is that of Ezekiel 34:11-31. Jehovah is the good shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, who divides between the true and the false, who brings the flock back to its old pasture. The land becomes fruitful once more, the inhabitants live independent of all surrounding peoples, in security. The form of government is the old kingdom. At its head is placed a prince of the

line of David or one reproducing his character and activity. In Ezekiel 37 : 15-28 Israel is to return as well as Judah. There is to be but one kingdom under the old Davidic king. Compare also the parable of the cedar twig (Ezek. 17 : 22-24).

A central thought in all this is the re-establishment of the worship of Jehovah in the temple. The exiles did not know how to worship God aright after the destruction of his temple and their removal from Zion. The ancient idea was still strong with them that Jehovah, the nation's God, could not be rightly served after the destruction of his nation and the removal of his people from their homes. So they ardently longed for restoration on this account, that they might properly render to him that service which was his due in the way which he had appointed. Ezekiel and the second Isaiah refer again and again to this, and Ezekiel especially has devoted his last chapters to an imaginary picture of the restored temple and its worship, about which the new community is gathered (Ezek. 20 : 40 ; 40-48 ; Isa. 44 : 28 ; 56 : 7 ; 52 : 1, 11).

2. *The new community.*—The nation has perished. How shall it be revived and be prepared for its return and restoration? This was the great problem of the exilic prophets. The vision that they beheld was as strange as it was splendid. Reference has already been made to the development of Isaiah's thought of the "remnant" by Jeremiah. Jehovah would write his statutes upon their hearts. The new nation would spontaneously obey Jehovah's will. Ezekiel goes a step farther. With him the implied individualism of Jeremiah becomes explicit. Jehovah deals with every man according to his deeds (Ezek. 3 : 16-21 ; 18 : 1-32 ; 33 : 10-20). Thus the community which is built up under his inspiration is composed of individuals who enter into personal relation with Jehovah and are united together by being united to him. And for such a community as this Jehovah promises to remove the unresponsive stony heart and to supply the heart of flesh, inspired with his spirit. With them is an everlasting covenant made and Jehovah takes up his abode with them (Ezek. 36 : 25-27 ; 11 : 19, 20 ; 37 : 26, 27).

This body of the faithful assumes in the eyes of the second Isaiah a position of wonderful dignity. Its title with him is "the Servant" (41 : 8 ; 44 : 1 ; 49 : 3). To it a lofty mission is assigned, that of teaching to all nations the knowledge and service of the true God (42 : 1-7 ; 49 : 6). In wonderful imagery he pictures the nations coming with their gifts, yielding up their treasure, offering their services in behalf of Jehovah's servant (43 : 3 ; 44 : 5 ; 45 : 14 ; 49 : 22, 23 ; 52 : 15).

But the servant is not without his trials also. There was an Israel, a "Servant," which was slow to accept Jehovah's way, which was despairing and hopeless under its accumulated misfortunes, as well as a "Servant" that accepted in faith and hope the will of its God and sought to obey him in the darkness as well as in the light. How shall the prophet explain the misery and torture of the exile life with its separation from Jehovah, with its despair, its suffering occasioned by the pride of the captor and the arrogance of the apostate (Isa. 50 : 5, 6 ; 51 : 17-23 ; 48 : 1-11)? For there was still another Israel besides the "Servant"—a false Israel, who had departed from Jehovah and accepted the idols. These were the more willing to prove their fidelity to their new gods by persecution of the faithful servants of him whom they deserted. To this faithful, suffering community the prophet explains the meaning of their condition, and holds forth a sublime prospect of their future. As they are the messengers of Jehovah to reveal his character to those who are about them, so their sufferings patiently endured are to be a means whereby Jehovah's name shall be exalted and Jehovah's character vindicated. They are punished on behalf of others. That which is inflicted upon them is what should be borne by their enemies. But out of their sufferings and by means of them they, too, shall rise to a more glorious future. They will be vindicated, and Jehovah shall highly exalt them. This will become clear, indeed, only later to those who have been redeemed through the obscure and suffering "Servant." They will understand it and wonder and glorify him (Isa. 52 : 13-53 : 12 ; Ps. 22).

Such was the ideal community which before the inspired vision of the exiled prophets appeared as the consummation of Jehovah's grace. As has been suggested, its character is above all else spiritual. A new heart has been bestowed upon it. Jehovah's spirit dwells with it. It is free from evil doing. Idolatry has disappeared from it. Jehovah alone is its God. The realization of this community brings with it so wondrous a transformation of life that the prophet can picture it only as the advent of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65 : 17-25).

### III. THE FORESHADOWINGS.

These points should suggest some definite Messianic applications and determinations.

1. We cannot help noticing the combination of high spiritual anticipations with *local and temporal expectations*. The prophet who saw the ideal Israel as endowed with a new heart and inspired with



Jehovah's spirit looks for an immediate restoration, the rebuilding of the temple, and the revival of the ritual worship in a purified and more highly developed form. How strange! How incomprehensible, indeed, unless one looks at it from the historical point of view! Then it is clear how, in view of the concurrent testimony of the prophets of old to this outcome, the seer, hampered by the exilic environment, must needs behold these large truths in their temporal form. Unfortunately, one is almost tempted to say, it was this narrow and material view which dominated the succeeding ages, which turned the whole current of Jewish life into formalism and ritualism, and blinded the spiritual vision of the generations that followed, even to the present day, when interpreters would fain turn what is concerned with the husk, the temporary form, of the revelation into symbolical and fantastic pictures of what is still to come.

2. The prophecy of this age and its outlooks into the future caught in large, vague outline a vision of *the era of grace*. Already, indeed, earlier prophets had here and there touched upon it — Hosea in his matchless pictures of divine love, Isaiah, in his message of deliverance in the midst of disaster, Jeremiah, preëminently, with his insight into Jehovah's relation to the individual soul and his assurance of the divine forgiveness. But now, as never before, are these thoughts conceived and these hopes entertained in clear and definite forms, and developed into articles of faith. This may be said to be one of the especial elements in Ezekiel's vision. It is the secret of his delineation of Jehovah, who by some students is thought to have been presented by the prophet as utterly separate from man, as a despot, carrying out with unyielding rigor his self-centered purposes. They fail to grasp, however, that these elements of Jehovah's character only reflect all the more clearly that which lies beneath them, viz., the supreme purpose of this mighty and incomparable Jehovah to bestow salvation of his own free grace upon his people. "That ye may know that I am Jehovah," the refrain which sounds so monotonously through the prophet's messages, is the motto of the new dispensation, in which Jehovah will save even to the uttermost, raising his people from the dead and bestowing upon them the Divine Spirit. Likewise the prophet brings the whole history of Israel's past under contribution to illustrate and emphasize the same splendid assurance. And this manifestation of grace is unspeakably wondrous in its achievements. It transforms human life. It brings the individual into immediate spiritual relation to God. It purifies and hallows his character. With such

logical insight is this thought developed that Davidson's words are not too strong when he says that such a passage as Ezek. 36 : 24-29 "reads like a fragment of a Pauline epistle."

The same thoughts are suggested from a different point of view in the second Isaiah. To the crushed and ruined exiles comes the voice of the herald proclaiming the advent of Jehovah who is to lead them on, sustaining them by his strength, inspiring and guiding them by his spirit, purifying them by his presence, who is the High and Holy One, sending them forth thus redeemed, to be in their turn the heralds of his advent to the nations.

3. The supreme Messianic foreshadowing of this age considered in its more definite aspect is the idea of *the holy community* depicted by these prophets. It cannot but be observed by any student who examines with unprepossessed judgment these prophetic utterances that there is a lack of definite reference to a personal Messiah, or at least a want of emphasis upon such a thought. David is mentioned once or twice; a parable or so like that of the cedar twig is given. But in the place of the individual appears the community. The very fact that these exilic prophets conceived of a religious body separate from national life, united by an individual relation to Jehovah, is a remarkable prefiguring of the Church. The various details which gather about this conception are equally striking. Earlier prophets, indeed, had already looked forward to the restored nation as the religious center of the world. But while the same thoughts appear here also, yet in the conception of the "Servant" by the second Isaiah a great step forward was taken, in that Israel now goes forth to the nations with its message of Jehovah. It becomes a prophet, preaching the message of righteousness and obedience to the holy God in all the earth.

A remarkable turn, also, is given in representing this same community of the faithful as a victim slain on behalf of sinners. It is the culmination of the priestly and the ritual conceptions of the past, but wonderfully transformed, so that Israel is not merely a priestly nation mediating on behalf of men, but offering itself as the acceptable and potent sacrifice. And as a result of its work in both these directions it is glorified and exalted beyond all expectation and imagination.

Who can fail to be impressed with the foreshadowing in these prophetic ideals? And they have been conceived under forms of speech so individualistic that, though the author may not have meant it, they have been in the consciousness of the faithful and devout in all ages centered upon him, who is above all others the "Servant of Jehovah."